

PROLOGUE

DAR 'E SALAM.

TANGANYIKA

January 1960

Silence hung over the crowded hall like a shroud, but the atmosphere of mounting indignation was palpable. The man at the podium had recently returned from Moscow where he'd graduated with distinction from a programme of communist indoctrination developed and sponsored by the Kremlin.

Standing at over six foot, his broad shoulders and tapered waist were complimented by an immaculately tailored navy blue business suit, over a starched white shirt and red tie. A relaxed, economy of movement in the way he carried himself emphasized an unspoken presence of confidence and command.

The hall was a shabby community centre in a township slum on the outskirts of the city. Folding metal chairs in varying stages of disrepair were set out in rows on a warped wooden floor. The whitewashed walls were faded and stained, and the bare windows were in need of cleaning. Suspended from a sagging ceiling on frayed electric cord, a scattering of naked light bulbs provided muted illumination. Crammed into the venue, an audience of two hundred listened in captivated silence, mesmerized by the man's charisma and eloquence.

"For four centuries" his booming voice reverberated off the walls in a deep baritone, "the continent of Africa has been a pillaging ground for colonizing forces from Europe. The Portuguese, the French, Dutch, Belgians, Germans, Italians and the British have all laid claim to our land. They have raped our resources and enslaved our people. They carved up the continent into borders and colonized territories for their own expedience. They drew lines on a map, claiming the land of our traditional tribal heritage and built citadels of white man's privilege and wealth on ground where the spirits of our ancestors rest. Through greed, deception and exploitation they have stolen our property and our freedom. Above all, they have cast us aside as objects of irritation when we have tried to reason with them on the subject of justice and opportunity for our people. Attempts at finding a peaceful means of co-existence with the invaders have proven to be an exercise in futility. Now the time has come to fight back!

We will reclaim our continent!

"Progressively we, the Black Consciousness activists, the People's National Revolutionary Armies of Africa will intensify our struggle. We challenge the legitimacy of the colonizers in our pursuit of justifiable demands for self-determination, the return of our land, the rehabilitation of our freedom and the end of slavery!"

He paused and stared at his audience as if defying them to challenge him.

"Comrades," he continued earnestly, "we are not alone! There is a global groundswell of support. There is an emerging international doctrine demanding freedom for the people of Africa. This mind-set is gathering momentum and has support among the sponsors of our liberation. In the corridors of power on the world's political stage Africa and the injustice of colonialism is on every agenda. The grip of white supremacy in Africa is slipping! It is loosening under the pressure of our heroic Revolutionary forces, and our struggle can no longer be ignored."

He spoke for over an hour, his zeal goading his audience, inciting them in a fever of indignity, kindled with anger, bloodlust and patriotic devotion.

“The fight for the liberation of our continent must not falter,” he urged. “We must not slumber nor grow complacent! The struggle will continue and our victory is certain!”

Timing the climax with the assurance of a showman, his shaven head glistening with perspiration, he raised a clenched fist high above his head. In fluent Swahili, he bellowed: “*Mzungu Aende Ulaya! Mwafrika Apate Uhuru!*” Let the European go back to Europe! Let the African regain his Independence!’

Switching back to English he concluded: “Our strength is our survival Comrades. Our will is akin to an ever intensifying storm soon to overwhelm the trespassers and blow them away like *clouds in the wind!*”

A roar of applause went up in a crescendo of frenzied approval. The scholar turned militant raised both arms in acknowledgement of his audience and turned from the lectern to resume his place among the VIPs on the stage behind him. Applauding, they rose from their seats in unison and each in turn embraced the orator, honouring their brother in arms.

Cape Town **South Africa**

February 1960

Called to the podium, the guest speaker rose gracefully and strode forward in dignified self assurance, characteristic of a lifetime in positions of privilege and power. His surroundings in the ornate oak-panelled hall, the crystal chandeliers, heavy satin drapes and soft thick carpeting, symbolized the prosperity and strength of a successful and long-standing colonial heritage.

This was the eighth country the man had visited in ten days, and his keen blue eyes betrayed his fatigue. His features were handsome though ageing and a gaunt pallor was barely concealed behind the flush of colour from recent, unaccustomed exposure to the harsh African sun. During his tour he had been met alternately with reverence and hostility and these encounters had left him both enlightened and disturbed.

Thirty three years of political life had taken him to the pinnacle of his career when three years earlier, he had taken office as Prime Minister of Great Britain. Experience told him his message today would not rest easily with his audience of South African Parliamentarians. These bulky men in their dark double-breasted suits were the sons of Afrikaners who, six decades earlier, had fought the British with Musket and cannon on the battle fields of the Anglo Boer war. That conflict remained an open wound in the flesh of Afrikaner heritage. They neither trusted nor liked the British.

“Honourable members of this House, members of the press and all African members of the Commonwealth,” he began, “I thank you for this opportunity to present my government’s greetings.”

The words were spoken in a clear and resounding timbre with a tone of unambiguous authority:

“In fifty years, since the formation of the Union, the people of South Africa have built a strong economy founded upon healthy agricultural expertise and thriving, resilient industries. No one could fail to be impressed with the immense material progress achieved. That all this has been accomplished in so short a time is a striking testimony to the skill, energy and initiative of the South African people.

“Times however are changing, and since the end of the war, the world has seen the awakening of a national consciousness in people and nations who for centuries, have lived

within the borders of their own land under conditions of servants and dependants to some or other colonial power, or an entrenched nation of settlers..!! Countries of different races, beliefs and civilizations have pressed their claim to an independent national life and self-governance with demands for an end to colonial and foreign rule.”

He paused for effect, glancing with stern appraisal at his audience. Among them, he saw expressions of naked contempt. As far as the majority of these parliamentarians were concerned, they had already claimed their independence from the British Crown. They had already seized their right to sovereignty and self rule. What applied elsewhere in Africa did not apply to the country of white Afrikaner heritage. The ardent belief of God himself having delivered this right to them in the South African general election of 1948 was entrenched. South Africa was and always would be their *Vaderland*.

“Today,” continued MacMillan, “this is happening in Africa, and the most striking feature I have witnessed since leaving London, is the strength and resilience of the African National Consciousness. In different places it takes different forms, but it is happening everywhere and it is obvious to me and my government this awakening of pride and spirit cannot be ignored.”

His words came across firm and clear through the public address system and for the moment he held sway, but a quiet undercurrent of murmuring from the ruling party benches indicated irredeemably, this august gathering reserved its own views. They would not be ignored either.

He paused again, and then raised his voice for dramatic impact:

“The winds of change are blowing through this continent ladies and gentlemen, and whether we like it or not this tide of national consciousness which is now rising in Africa, is a reality for which both you and we, and other nations of the western world are ultimately responsible. The awakening of the African spirit and their right to self determination is a political fact, an irreversible fact that our national policies, now and in the future, must take account of.”

He paused once more and stared in deliberate challenge at the defiant faces of his audience.

“As fellow members of the Commonwealth” he proceeded, “it is our earnest desire to give South Africa and the Southern African region our fullest support and encouragement in these changing times, but frankly there are some aspects of your legislation, the policies of Apartheid and racial segregation which make it impossible for us to do so.”

There was no mistaking the message beneath the diplomatic narrative. It was being suggested, perhaps demanded under a veiled threat, provision should be made for the indigenous African population to be given an inclusive role in government.

Harold Macmillan resumed his seat alongside his host, Prime Minister Dr. Hendrik Verwoerd. The murmur from the benches had become a hostile drone, erupting into a hubbub of defiance. Macmillan’s and Verwoerd’s eyes did not meet but in a hushed tone, Verwoerd spoke to his guest:

“Sir, we will never surrender our sovereignty.” he gestured with a hand to encompass the hallowed hall of power. “We fought far too hard and sacrificed far too much to achieve it, and we will fight and sacrifice even more to keep it. We have created a prosperous country under competent management. We have no intention of relinquishing that to the blacks and we do not need the utterances of a former colonial master directing our domestic affairs. Take that message back to London with you.”

It was clear the words from the leader of Great Britain had rubbed salt in old wounds. More, his words had struck against a people’s sense of destiny and conviction. He had fired a warning shot against a bastion of stone and touched a political nerve so profoundly painful as to be intolerable. His warning of a growing threat to peace and prosperity in the region would be cast aside with contempt.

CHAPTER 1

1980

Johannesburg, South Africa

The crowded nightclub was a place of escape and recreation for students and youthful revellers. At 31, Andrew Mason should have felt out of place here, but he was beyond caring. The liquor he'd consumed in steady measure since early that morning had mellowed his inhibitions and he tramped determinedly to the bar and ordered another drink. He'd lost count of how many he'd had. He didn't really care. He raised himself onto a stool with his back to the bar, his elbows resting on the counter top for support. Sipping at the drink, he surveyed the dancing teenagers moving like phantoms under the coloured stroboscopic lighting. The music blared so loudly he was sure nobody would notice if the place had been targeted by a mortar attack. It would be a catastrophe if fire broke out. But he would be the only one to have thought of that. These merry-makers were untouchable. Disaster of any kind was the last thing in the minds of this mass of young humanity.

Mason was a man of few words, although his rugged features, vigilant eyes and solid frame spoke volumes. Drunk or sober, this was not a man you'd want to be at odds with. But therein lurked a contradiction. There was vulnerability about him, a tangible sadness, diminishing the ruthlessness of the image and reflecting a portrait of sorrow and loneliness.

Few would relate to, or even believe the experiences Andy Mason had endured and his silent manner discouraged enquiry. Half a decade fighting for survival in a war he'd made his own, coupled with personal tragedy and betrayal, had moulded him in a way few would comprehend. The emotional scars he carried as a result were deep and painful.

Absorbed in his private world, he sensed rather than saw the woman. She had sidled up to a seat a few metres away, and when he lifted his head he saw he was being targeted by a seductive gaze.

Andy guessed she was in her late twenties or early thirties, also out of her age group among the crowd of youngsters gyrating on the dance floor or clinging to each other on the dark periphery. Her clothing suggested elegance and good taste and she wore it with the ease of practised self-assurance. Her black cotton tunic with a high collar was cut suggestively to expose a magnetising cleavage and a pair of firm breasts. Her skirt was short, and had ridden high on her crossed legs, long and shapely legs he noted, with firm alluring thighs. Her make-up was simple but sophisticated and there was a waft of a soft and enticing perfume, a musky fragrance that tingled in Andy's nostrils and of a quality with a high end price tag.

Mason was not so drunk as to miss the invitation. He hadn't enjoyed the company of a woman for far too long and this was like a gift. He grinned at her, gesturing first toward the blaring music and then to his ears. Raising his eyebrows, his head tilted slightly, he shrugged apologetically. He sat there frowning, not looking at the woman for a few moments,

and then he raised his head smiling, as if surprised by a sudden flash of inspiration. He clicked his fingers dramatically, leaving his index finger poised momentarily upward. Eyeing her shrewdly, he took a pen and paper from his pocket and scribbled a note which he passed along the counter to her.

‘You’re gorgeous,’ said the note.

She read it and chuckled delightedly, and then scribbled on the paper and passed it back.

‘You’re drunk,’ it said. Andy smirked, scribbled again and returned the piece of paper.

‘We’ve barely met and already you know me so well. I’m impressed.’

The woman laughed heartily and got up from her stool to sit on the one beside him. He put his head close to hers and yelled,

“If it’s a conversation you’re wanting you’d be wasting your time in this place!”

“What?” she yelled back.

“See what I mean?” his mouth was close to her ear. She was still smiling: a genuine glowing smile lighting up her eyes and radiating sex appeal.

“Didn’t get that!” she yelled. “Would you like to go somewhere else?”

Andy shrugged and pursed his lips, rolling his head backwards as if undecided and needing to think about it. After only a few moments he reached across and took her hand.

When he woke, he was in his apartment with a throbbing booze-induced headache. His mouth was as dry and rough as an emery board and his eyes felt swollen and ached as if they were too big for their sockets. The sensation was not unfamiliar; he’d woken up feeling like that more often than he cared to admit in recent months.

He turned over sleepily and cast an arm across the bed, expecting to feel the touch of soft eager flesh. Instead, his reach flopped onto a crumpled sheet. After a moment of contemplation he raised his throbbing head and stared through bloodshot eyes at the vacant spot where he had expected the woman to be. There was nobody there.

He instinctively turned and looked at the dresser where he’d left his wallet and watch. There was nothing there either.

‘Bitch,’ he muttered, and his head slumped back on the pillow. He tried to remember how much had been in the wallet when he’d entered the nightclub the previous evening, but was more annoyed by his own stupidity than having been robbed of the money. The watch was a not a valuable piece but he’d had it for a long time and the loss of it irritated him as much as the foolishness of falling victim to such an obvious con.

‘Maybe I should go looking for the slut,’ he muttered to himself. ‘Get the stuff back from her? Mmm?’ He reflected for a moment. Then, ‘Nah! Not a good idea; there’s probably a pimp behind this, with a bunch of brawny thugs at his side.’ He wasn’t as concerned about a potential altercation with the pimp as the possibility of where it could end up. ‘In a police cell maybe?’ He pulled a face. ‘It’s not worth going down that road. The hell with it! Forget the bitch. I’ll get over it.’

He rose naked from the bed and walked unsteadily from the bedroom to the lounge where he’d left the half drunk bottle of spirits. He was relieved to see it was still there on the coffee table. He strode over, and with trembling hands, eagerly poured a double measure into a tumbler.

Warm relief soaked through his veins as he gulped at the drink. Picking up the bottle, he returned to the bedroom and sat down heavily on the side of the bed trying to piece together the events of the night. All he could remember was being enthralled by the woman and the prospect of getting laid—and then? . . . It had never happened.

He didn't know if she'd drugged him or if it was just the booze, but either way she'd caught him off guard and clearly had her plans worked out in advance.

'And it cost me around five hundred bucks and my watch,' he muttered with disgust.

He sighed deeply, his shoulders sagging under the weight of humiliation. The relief brought on by the shot of liquor quickly subsided, giving way to despair and remorse. He reached for the bottle and poured another then swallowed it in a single gulp.

Being caught out by a con artist would never have happened six months earlier. Then, he would have picked up on the warning signs. He would have been suspicious of the seductive smile and the unsolicited come-on. He would have scoured the room to see where her minders had positioned themselves and played her at her own game; let her think she had him and then leave her to deal with her own resentment and vexation. In his present state of mind he'd walked blindly into her trap and paid the price.

He stood up unsteadily and caught his reflection in the mirror. The image did nothing to improve his self-esteem. From the neck down he appeared in good shape with a hard, well defined muscular form, but his hair was tousled and his unshaven face looked unwashed. His eyes were glazed and seemed to haemorrhage from both retinas. He looked terrible.

'Look at you,' he muttered with disgust. After a moment, he added: *'Loser.'*

He poured another drink and lurched across to the tall French window to admire the panoramic view the apartment afforded him.

The sun had not yet broken above the horizon, but its imminent rising was heralded by a soft golden glow in the east. The light reflected scarlet off sparse puffy clouds floating idly in a gentle breeze under the vast blue sky. It promised to be a beautiful day.

Staring out at the emerging light, drink in hand while absorbing the spectacular dawn, he was assailed by memories of a thousand sunrises in a different place, under different circumstances.... *In another life.*

He swallowed the drink and placed the empty glass on the bedside pedestal then slumped back on the bed as he mulled over the many images of an existence he'd left behind; a place in his mind where ethereal memories lived on, memories of contentment and of anguish.

Helped by the liquor, he drifted into a reverie, capturing all too clearly, and re-living the fateful twists through which his life had been mapped. The demons and phantoms recurrently emerging to torment him; events through which he had been transformed from scholar cum laude and successful young financial executive, to ruthless Special Forces combat soldier and wealthy widower.

CHAPTER 2

JANUARY 1963

The imposing wrought iron gates to the school stood open, providing easy access to the stream of family cars, transporting pupils to start their new term. The carefully tended sports fields were green and fresh beneath a misty haze cast by irrigation sprinklers and the spray refracted the sharp morning light into dancing rainbows.

A long driveway, lined by evenly spaced giant oaks ran between the fields and up a steep slope to a stately stone edifice, standing like a handsome fortress, a great paternal protector keeping vigil across the grounds. The driveway ended in a circle of colourful flowers embracing a large fishpond set into a rockery, shrouded with creeping ivy and a waterfall cascading down the rocks into the pond. A sweeping flight of stone steps led from the roadway to the formal entrance under a broad stone archway and domed clock tower. On each of the four sides of the tower was a huge timepiece displaying black Roman numerals against a mottled white face.

In every sense the setting was like an English public school, one of those ancient establishments for the sons of English gentry, but these surroundings were ten thousand kilometres remote from England; situated in sunlit South Africa, near a small Northern Transvaal town on the road-and-rail route to Rhodesia..

For half a century the school had served as a seedbed of privilege and excellence, the shaping of thousands of white Southern African boys. Here was the breeding ground for future politicians, business leaders and industrialists, national cricket and rugby heroes, the ruling caste of white South Africa.

The hallways and cloisters echoed with banter of returning pupils. Boys shouting greetings to their friends, while in the car park, subdued farewells to parents and siblings marked the end of the long Christmas holidays and the beginning of a new way of life for the first formers.

Amidst the bustle of activity, Andrew Mason emerged from the back seat of his father's Austin Princess and retrieved his bags from the trunk. He put them down on the verge beside the car and turned to his parents.

"You've done us proud, son," his father squeezed his hand in a firm grip and clapped him on the shoulder.

"Keep up the good work. The education you're getting here is important; it'll stand you in good stead for the years to come. In this changing world, who knows what the future will bring?"

Andy pulled a face at the well-worn clichés. He'd heard more than enough about the 'uncertain future' and 'the advance of communism in Africa and the black puppet politicians who promoted it'. This was a hobby horse of his father's generation. Conversations with family friends and acquaintances invariably drifted towards the 'approaching onslaught of black power and anarchy'. And every single parent who spoke at Founders' Day or Prize giving said '*Keep up the good work. It'll stand you in good stead.*'

"I'm only fifteen, dad! Give me a chance! I'll cover the basics before we're overrun. But who knows? I might end up as a civil rights lawyer and champion the cause of black liberty."

His father shoved him away in mock horror. "Talk like will get arrested, young man," he scolded, but grinned fondly at his son.

Andy reached out to his mother, weeping discreetly into her handkerchief. He had grown to accept this as a habitual characteristic at the start of a new term. His mother was not unemotional with goodbyes and his heart went out to her.

"Cheer up mom," he consoled her. "It's only three months until Easter and time flies. Remember, I'm here to be educated, not executed. Hey, and Alec is coming to spend the holidays with us"

She hugged him tightly and kissed him. "Look after yourself, my love I miss you terribly." Then she quickly turned and got back into the car as his father got in behind the wheel.

Andy watched the car draw away and raised his hand in a gesture of farewell. He retrieved his bags and headed toward the third form hostel.

Andrew Mason walked with an air of confidence in his step. At fifteen he was just edging over the latter stages of puberty. He was a tall, well-built adolescent with thick chestnut brown hair, trimmed short-back-and-sides in keeping with school regulations. He had clear hazel eyes and prominent dimples in both cheeks when he smiled. He was a popular and active student with good reason to be confident. His parents were caring and supportive; he produced excellent results in the classroom as well as on the sports field. He captained his age-group in both rugby and cricket, and he held the schools under-sixteen 1,500 and 3,000 metre track records. He was at the centre of his circle of peers and there was unspoken acceptance he was in the running for Head Boy in his senior year.

Striding along the roadway in the bright morning sunlight immersed in thought, he was unaware of the Chev Impala with Northern Rhodesian license plates close behind him. The unexpected blast of the car's horn caused him to instinctively leap away onto the sidewalk. He spun around to identify the source of the intrusion and in the passenger seat of the car, consumed with laughter sat Alec Bradford

"Nerves, Mason! Nerves!" he called out laughing through the open window as the car drifted slowly passed him. "You should try moving that fast off the starting blocks, champ! You'd be unbeatable."

"You should be more careful about who you scare the bejesus out of, Bradford," retorted Andy. "You don't have many friends as it is."

The Chev pulled to the verge ahead of Andy and three occupants emerged. The first was a tall and ruggedly handsome man who could only have been Alec's father. He had the same wavy blonde hair, though shot through with white, and his alert blue eyes gave an impression of perpetual amusement. He wore an open-necked checked shirt and short pants, with socks pulled neatly up to his knees, and a pair of veldskoen shoes. His resemblance to Alec was remarkable and it wasn't difficult to picture him at the same age like an identical twin.

Alec's mother emerged from the back seat of the car, a plump cheerful-looking woman, deeply tanned and freckled. Her auburn hair was tied in a bun at the top of her head and she wore a light knee-length sleeveless cotton dress with a floral design and cowhide sandals. She walked briskly up to Andy and embraced him in a demonstrative hug. She kissed him warmly on the cheek. The third was Alec himself, grinning impudently at his friend.

Alec and Andy had met two years previously, on their first day at the school. They'd stood together in line outside the bursar's office waiting to be registered, both of them apprehensive and way out of their depth. The walls of the corridor were lined with row upon row of framed black-and-white photographs – decades of sports teams and school achievers seeming to stare down on the new boys in an attitude of intimidating challenge. Making a new friend was a relief.

"I'm Alec Bradford" said the other boy, extending his hand.

"Hi. I'm Andrew Mason."

"Where are you from?"

"Jo'burg. And you?"

"I'm from Ndola in Northern Rhodesia."

"Wow," said Andy. "You're a long way from home! That's on the Copper Belt, isn't it?"

"Just south of the Belgian Congo border." Affirmed Alec.

"Where the mercenaries are fighting?" Andy had heard the news broadcasts about the troubles in the Congo although they meant little to him. But here was someone close to the action. It sounded adventurous to a 13 year old.

Alec frowned. "All we know is when the refugees come across the border. My dad says they're rich colonials who've lost all their money because of the independence war and they

leave most of their stuff behind just to get away. They come through on tractors and old trucks, some of them in posh new cars. But they don't stay long. Ndola's on the doorstep, but it's okay."

"What does your dad do?"

"He manages a copper mine. We live there. We're in the sticks, about fifteen miles from town. But it's okay, we have fun. There's the mine club with a golf course and tennis courts and a swimming pool. We go hunting in the bush and fishing when my dad's free."

"Why don't you go to school there?"

"There aren't any," replied Alec "No decent schools. All the mine kids get sent to school in Southern Rhodesia or here. Except the black kids from the compounds. They don't go to school at all – or some get taught by missionaries. They sit under trees for their classes."

Two years had passed since that first encounter and the two boys had become close friends. But Andy had never met Alec's parents.

"So this is Andy, is it?" Alec's mother released Andy from her embrace and stood back to inspect him with a warm approving smile.. "We've heard all about you for so long. It's nice to meet you at last. I'm Jean."

"I'm Jed" said the man extending his hand with an easy grin. Andy smiled. The Bradfords were reassuring in their easy familiarity.

"Hi," he said laughing. "I'm Andy and very nearly Alec's ex-friend." They all laughed and Andy turned to Alec, "How were the hols?"

"Brilliant. We had four amazing weeks in Lorenzo Marques. That place should have pearly gates on the approach roads. It's paradise."

They took Alec's bags from the trunk of the car and Jed drew a wad of notes from his pocket and shoved them into the breast pocket of Alec's blazer.

"Don't spend it all at once," he said. "There might not be any more where that came from." Then he turned to Andy:

"Andy, how about you come visit us in the July holidays? It's long overdue."

The epic three-day train journey from Pietersburg to Ndola made the trip during the short April and September school breaks impractical, and Alec was frequently a guest at Andy's home in Johannesburg. Andy had been invited to visit the Bradfords in return, but nothing had yet come of it.

"We'll organize it with your parents," said Jean. "We'd love to show you Northern Rhodesia."

"Thank you." Andy's face lit up. "I'd like that; it'll be like an adventure."

"We'll make it happen." Jed turned to Jean, "We'd better get moving. We have a hell of a long drive ahead of us and I want to reach Salisbury before dark. I don't want to be driving on that road at night, there's too much game on it."

They said their goodbyes and the two boys strode off to their hostel exchanging tales of holiday happenings.

Chapter 3

Rhodesia 1963

Parental arrangements were made and Andy was going to spend the July holidays in Northern Rhodesia. As the mid-year break drew nearer, his excitement grew. He had never been outside the borders of South Africa and Alec had painted a fantasy picture for him with his vivid descriptions of life on the Copper Belt.

When the day to leave finally arrived it was a chilly sub-tropical winter morning. The Rhodesian contingent, all boarders at the school, embarked at the Pietersburg station on the north-bound train and made it throb with their released energies. Three weeks of freedom lay ahead.

The train descended the steep southern escarpment, into the Limpopo valley and chugged across the flat basin of the lowveld towards the small border town of Beit Bridge.

They reached the Rhodesian border, crossing the railway bridge over the Limpopo River as the sun was going down and Andy was amazed by the rugged beauty of his surroundings. He had never seen a sunset of such extraordinary splendour. The sky to the west was a deep orange, stained by sparse lazy grey clouds hanging idly in the warm evening air. Against the sky were the darkening silhouettes of palm trees and the native Mopane vegetation. It seemed as if the entire world below the horizon was engulfed in an inferno and the moment had been captured on the canvass of a master artist..

The train laboured on through the night deeper into the Rhodesian interior. Ignoring the flying smuts from the steam locomotive, Andy slid open a window and his spirits rose in elation as the unfamiliar bushveld rolled past.

They reached the city of Bulawayo a little before eight the following morning, and a scheduled three-hour layover gave the boys a chance to go into the town. They took a taxi from the station into the city centre and Andy found himself marvelling at a town bustling with unexpected vibrance. It had a rural atmosphere and yet bore the stamp of an energetic metropolitan hive. The city streets were spotlessly clean and broad and grand. He'd read somewhere the streets in Rhodesian cities had been carved out in pioneering days at the turn of the century, when wagons drawn by teams of sixteen oxen could be turned around without the need to unhitch them.

The architecture showed the stages of historical progress: from the infancy of pioneering days and ornate Edwardian-era buildings, mingled easily with more modern structures. He was enthralled by the people on the streets and the impression of a society filled with energy and alive with excitement. Even the sun seemed to shine with a special brightness. There was an absence of anything vulgar or ostentatious about the town, and yet it seemed to exude a palpable passion and liveliness.

They strolled along the wide streets of the small city, lined with flamboyant and acacia trees in winter bloom. Bougainvillea abounded in a bright and glorious blend of colours while the famous avenues of huge jacaranda trees stood quiet and strangely bare in their winter rest. This was a different world from Johannesburg, an older and simpler world where false airs and graces did not seem to exist. The atmosphere was contagious and Andy felt as though he was floating on a cloud of contentment.

They left Bulawayo mid morning continuing their journey towards Northern Rhodesia. Andy was captivated by the natural splendour of endless African bush through which the railway line had been carved. Sparsely scattered amongst the dense tropical shrubbery, gigantic baobab trees more than a thousand years old stood out against the skyline, magnificent in their ugliness and laden with cream-of-tartar pods.

As they travelled further north, sightings of wild game became more prolific. They saw browsing herds of elephant and buffalo that stopped grazing to look up at them curiously as the train sped by. Herds of antelope and zebra, startled by the rattling carriages, bolted off through the bush and drew delighted laughter from the group of boys. Andy didn't think he

had ever been so happy. He couldn't remember a time when he'd experienced such a rush of liberty and well-being. If God had a country of his own, then this was surely it.

As evening approached, the train drew into the remote border town of Victoria Falls on the Zambezi River. There was a tangible carnival atmosphere in the air and tourists, laden with cameras and African curios, roamed the streets.

The train came to a wheezing halt at the small station overlooking the falls. Andy was awestruck by the spectacle of the powerful river and the wall of white water two kilometres wide, plummeting in a suicidal dive onto the jagged rocks in the gorge 120 metres below. As the water fell, it dispensed a cloud of spray, rising high above the rim of the ravine, forming a vapour cloud visible from fifty kilometres away. The constant roar of the tumbling torrent echoed off the walls and reverberated through the air like the din of an airliner's engines. In the forest along the river banks a relentless drizzle fell in a fine soggy haze as the mist descended gently back to earth.

The sun was sinking toward the western horizon and as the boys watched, it changed in colour and shape into a huge bright orange ball seemingly being swallowed by the wide wild waters of the Zambezi, leaving behind it a sky that mourned its passing in a rush of scarlet.

Andy had never seen anything of such breathtaking beauty. The majesty of that watery African sunset blending with the surrounding forest defied description. The rising cloud of mist with an arched rainbow framing the falls against the backdrop of the golden sky created an unbelievably beautiful vista. The cries of wild birds roosting and the stirring of nocturnal creatures added voice to the glorious setting and Andy was mesmerised.

As they boarded the train for their onward journey, Andy vowed, he would one day come back here with all those he loved, to relive and to share the richness and the splendour.

He had no idea, then, his return would be under very different circumstances.